

Mount Prospect, Ill. – U.S. Representative Mark Kirk today joined with local parents, teachers and law enforcement to call for federal action to protect kids from child predators and registered sex offenders on “Second Life” and other social networking Web sites. Congressman Kirk was joined by Mount Prospect Mayor Irvana Wilks, Mount Prospect Police Chief John Dahlberg, Mount Prospect Officer Dirk Ollech and 10th district parents and teachers Janet Joy and Bonnie Graham of Arlington Heights.

“During the past five years, social networking Web sites like MySpace, Facebook and Second Life exploded in popularity,” Congressman Kirk said. “As more kids flock to these sites, we’ve seen a corresponding increase of online sexual predators targeting children. According to a U.S. Department of Justice survey, one-in-five kids have been sexually solicited online. As new technologies develop, more disturbing revelations unfold. Sites like Second Life offer no protections to keep kids from virtual ‘rape rooms,’ brothels and drug stores. If sites like Second Life won’t protect kids from obviously inappropriate content, the Congress will.”

To raise parent awareness of these growing threats, Congressman Kirk sent a letter today to the chairman of the Federal Trade Commission requesting a consumer alert warning about the dangers of Second Life. On the site, kids create an online persona called an “avatar,” and interact with the program’s more than four million users. While Second Life claims to prevent children under the age of 13 from accessing the site, there are no age verification features built into the registration process. Second Life’s own lawyers admit that its “teen area” may have adults prowling and the adult area may have children present. Outside of the pre-approved “teen area” are countless locations where users engage in virtual prostitution, drug use and other wholly inappropriate activities. Drug dealers and predators routinely attempt to contact users in the real world once a meeting happens in Second Life.

According to I-Safe America, nearly one-third of kids have chatted with strangers on the Internet, and 12 percent have met online strangers in person. Social networking Web sites are often the entryway for predators to build trust with a kid online, preparing for an eventual “in-person” meeting.

With more than 150 million registered users on MySpace.com alone, children’s detailed personal information – last name, address, phone number, school, schedule and photograph – can be easily accessed by sexual predators. Last year, the Illinois Attorney General discovered nearly 850 registered sex offenders in Illinois who use Myspace.com.

Congressman Kirk also detailed his legislation to help parents play a larger role in the safety of their kids. He introduced the bipartisan Deleting Online Predators Act, which passed in the House in 2006 by an overwhelming vote of 410-15, but did not see Senate action. The bill currently has 91 bipartisan cosponsors.

The Deleting Online Predators Act requires schools to prevent children from accessing social networking Web sites and chat rooms like MySpace unless they are doing so for a legitimate educational purpose and are under adult supervision. It also requires public libraries to prevent children from accessing these Web sites unless they have the permission of a parent.

The Predator's Act also requires that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 90 days:

- Create a Web site with a distinctive Uniform Resource Locator to educate parents, teachers, school officials and others regarding the dangers on the Internet to child users. This Web site would include information about commercial networking sites like MySpace and chat rooms.
- Issue consumer alerts to parents, teachers, school officials and others regarding the potential dangers of Internet child predators and their ability to contact children through commercial networking sites like MySpace and chat rooms.

The Predator's Act requires that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC):

- Establish an advisory board to review and report commercial social networking sites like MySpace.com and chat rooms that allow sexual predators easy access to personal information of, and contact with, children.

At the press conference, officers with the Mount Prospect Police Department detailed their work to fight child predators in the suburbs. Mount Prospect was home to one of the first online child exploitation crimes. More than 10 years ago, a sixth-grade boy was lured by an adult man posing as a child on the Internet. The Florida-based predator convinced the child to board a bus for a rendezvous. Quick action by the police department and the FBI prevented the child from reaching the criminal.

Demonstrating the risks in MySpace, Mount Prospect police officers created a fictional profile of a 15-year-old Mount Prospect girl. A 29-year-old man sent the fake girl a message, calling her "adorable" and asked to get to know her better. An individual also encouraged her to prostitute herself by sending her a message about a companionship service in Elk Grove.

A copy of Congressman Kirk's letter to the FTC and the Predators Act legislation are below. Screengrabs of inappropriate Second Life locations and MySpace predator messages are available upon request.

May 5, 2008

William E. Kovacic
Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Kovacic:

I write to share my concern regarding the increasingly popular virtual reality webspace, Second Life, which contains explicit content that can be easily accessed by minors.

Second Life and its owner, Linden Lab of San Francisco, has no controls in place to prevent minors from creating an account, giving minors access to pornographic and explicit material for no charge. Second Life claims to prevent children under the age of 13 from accessing the site, but there are no age verification features built into the registration process. Although many of the program's features require a credit card, there are many areas in which sexually explicit content is free and readily available.

Using the search tool, minors have the ability to teleport to locations where there are brothels, rape rooms, sex clubs and bondage stores. The images and language in these parts of Second Life are graphic and inappropriate for children.

Not only does Second Life contain explicit material but it also can pose as a “virtual hunting ground” for pedophiles to prey on young children using the anonymity of the Internet. Second Life has over four million users across the world. Reports of sexual assaults and kidnappings linked to the Internet are growing. According to the Justice Department, one in five kids have been sexually solicited online. I-Safe America estimates nearly one-third of kids have chatted with strangers on the Internet and 12 percent have met online strangers in person.

In 2006, Representative Frank Wolf and I wrote to your predecessor asking her to issue a consumer alert warning parents of the dangers social networking Web sites pose to children. Then-Chairman Majoras acted quickly to increase awareness of this threat among parents. I urge you, on behalf of the Commission, to take action to warn parents of the similar dangers and sexually explicit content found on Second Life. If Second Life is unwilling to protect minor children from explicit material on their Web site, it is imperative that we warn parents of the danger Second Life represents so they can effectively monitor their children’s Internet usage.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Mark Kirk

Member of Congress

H. R. 1120

To amend the Communications Act of 1934 to require recipients of universal service support for schools and libraries to protect minors from commercial social networking websites and chat rooms.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 16, 2007

Mr. KIRK (for himself, Mr. MATHESON, Mrs. BIGGERT, Ms. GRANGER, Mr. ROGERS of Michigan, Mr. SHAYS, Mr. FOSSELLA, Mr. KUHL of New York, Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky, Mr. MARCHANT, Mr. MCKEON, Mr. GERLACH, and Mr. ROSKAM) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce

A BILL

To amend the Communications Act of 1934 to require recipients of universal service support for schools and libraries to protect minors from commercial social networking websites and chat rooms.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the `Deleting Online Predators Act of 2007'.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds that--

- (1) sexual predators approach minors on the Internet using chat rooms and social networking websites, and, according to the United States Attorney General, one in five children has been approached sexually on the Internet;
- (2) sexual predators can use these chat rooms and websites to locate, learn about, befriend, and eventually prey on children by engaging them in sexually explicit conversations, asking for photographs, and attempting to lure children into a face to face meeting; and
- (3) with the explosive growth of trendy chat rooms and social networking websites, it is becoming more and more difficult to monitor and protect minors from those with devious intentions, particularly when children are away from parental supervision.

SEC. 3. CERTIFICATIONS TO INCLUDE PROTECTIONS AGAINST COMMERCIAL SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES AND CHAT ROOMS.

(a) Certification by Schools- Section 254(h)(5)(B) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 254(h)(5)(B)) is amended by striking clause (i) and inserting the following:

`(i) is enforcing a policy of Internet safety for minors that includes monitoring the online activities of minors and the operation of a technology protection measure with respect to any of its computers with Internet access that--

`(I) protects against access through such computers to visual depictions that are--

`(aa) obscene;

`(bb) child pornography; or

`(cc) harmful to minors; and

`(II) protects against access to a commercial social networking website or chat room unless used for an educational purpose with adult supervision; and'.

(b) Certification by Libraries- Section 254(h)(6)(B) of such Act (47 U.S.C. 254(h)(6)(B)) is amended by striking clause (i) and inserting the following:

- `(i) is enforcing a policy of Internet safety that includes the operation of a technology protection measure with respect to any of its computers with Internet access that--
- `(I) protects against access through such computers to visual depictions that are--
- `(aa) obscene;
- `(bb) child pornography; or
- `(cc) harmful to minors; and
- `(II) protects against access by minors without parental authorization to a commercial social networking website or chat room, and informs parents that sexual predators can use these websites and chat rooms to prey on children; and'.

(c) Definitions- Section 254(h)(7) is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

- `(J) COMMERCIAL SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES; CHAT ROOMS- Within 120 days after the date of enactment of the Deleting Online Predators Act of 2007, the Commission shall by rule define the terms `social networking website' and `chat room' for purposes of this subsection. In determining the definition of a social networking website, the Commission shall take into consideration the extent to which a website--
- `(i) is offered by a commercial entity;
- `(ii) permits registered users to create an on-line profile that includes detailed personal information;
- `(iii) permits registered users to create an on-line journal and share such a journal with other users;
- `(iv) elicits highly-personalized information from users; and
- `(v) enables communication among users.'.

(d) Disabling During Adult or Educational Use- Section 254(h)(5)(D) of such Act is amended--

- (1) by inserting `OR EDUCATIONAL' after `DURING ADULT' in the heading; and
- (2) by inserting before the period at the end the following: `or during use by an adult or by minors with adult supervision to enable access for educational purposes pursuant to subparagraph (B)(i)(II)'.

SEC. 4. FTC CONSUMER ALERT ON INTERNET DANGERS TO CHILDREN.

- (a) Information Regarding Child Predators and the Internet- Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Federal Trade Commission shall--
- (1) issue a consumer alert regarding the potential dangers to children of Internet child predators, including the potential danger of commercial social networking websites and chat rooms through which personal information about child users of such websites may be accessed by child predators; and

(2) establish a website to serve as a resource for information for parents, teachers and school administrators, and others regarding the potential dangers posed by the use of the Internet by children, including information about commercial social networking websites and chat rooms through which personal information about child users of such websites may be accessed by child predators.

(b) Commercial Social Networking Websites- For purposes of the requirements under subsection (a), the terms `commercial social networking website' and `chat room' have the meanings given such terms pursuant to section 254(h)(7)(J) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 254(h)(7)(J)), as amended by this Act.